

discussed this with the President, and he's developing strategies that will hopefully bring them out safely. That's all I ask.

It's amazing, isn't it, to live in a society where you've got part of your country where people just kidnap somebody who is here trying to help, without any regard to whether or not—how their family feels.

So that's what I think about, sir. That's what's on my mind about those hostages. Obviously, I'd like to see them come out safely.

Matt [Matt Spetalnick, Reuters].

Iran and Syria/Iraq Regional Conference

Q. President Bush, in your assessment, what, if anything, was accomplished at the Baghdad regional conference? And what are your expectations for future rounds? Also, do you take—do you believe that Iran and Syria were serious in their post-conference statements that they want to help stabilize Iraq? And if that is true, do you see a possibility of opening the way towards more formal direct contacts with those two countries?

President Bush. I'm the kind of person that likes people to say something and then do it; then we'll react. Words are easy to say in politics, in the international diplomacy. If they really want to help stabilize Iraq, there are things for them to do, such as cutting off weapon flows and/or the flow of suicide bombers into Iraq. There's all kind of ways to measure whether they're serious about the words they uttered. We, of course, welcome those words. Those are nice statements. And now they can act on them.

I thought the conference—well, first of all, I thought the conference got people in the neighborhood to say positive things about the young democracy. In other words, people are now committed publicly to helping Iraq, which was, I thought, very positive. I think the other benefit from the conference is, is that the government gained some confidence. In other words, this young democracy had nations from around the neighborhood and around the world come and talk to them in a way that was constructive and positive.

Part of the success in Iraq is going to be whether or not this government has got the confidence necessary to make hard decisions. They're learning what democracy is all about.

They've come from a tyranny to democracy in a pretty quick period of time. And I believe the conference will give the different factions inside Iraq the confidence necessary to do the hard things to reconcile and the government the confidence necessary to make the decision so that reconciliation can happen.

So it was a positive outcome. And in terms of the expectations of the next meetings, we'll see. But the point is, is that the momentum made in the first one can be carried over to the second one. Secretary Rice will be going to that meeting. In other words, it's a step up in—I'm not dissing anybody, but it's a step up in the pay grade, let's put it that way. [Laughter] And I think—and I think Condi is going to—will take an agenda that will help advance this young democracy, and she's going to work with the other nations to do so.

Gracias, Senor Presidente.

President Uribe. *Gracias, President.*

President Bush. Thank you very much. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 3:34 p.m. at Casa de Narino. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates. President Uribe referred to Andres Mauricio Penate Giraldo, Director, Department of Security Administration, and Minister of National Defense Juan Manuel Santos Calderon of Colombia. President Uribe also referred to ELN, the National Liberation Army, and FARC, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. A reporter referred to President Hugo Chavez Frias of Venezuela. President Uribe spoke in Spanish, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks Prior to a Discussion on the United States Afro-Colombian Outreach Program in Bogota

March 11, 2007

Well, Mr. President, thank you very much. Laura and I, as well as Secretary of State Rice and our Ambassador, are honored that citizens from your country have come to share with us stories and concerns that will better enable our Government to help. And

the reason I say that is because the best foreign policy for the United States is to help people realize their full potential. That can be done through education—jobs.

The President and I had a long discussion this morning about issues that will help create jobs and facilitate the flow of trade, for example, all aiming at helping the people in our respective countries realize God-given potential. And so we come bringing the greetings of the people of the United States. Our Ambassador has briefed me on some of the programs that the taxpayers of my country have helped fund. But we're really interested in hearing your stories. And Colombia is a fine democracy. And the true test of a democracy is for every citizen in that country to be able to feel the full promise of society.

And so we thank you for coming. And, Mr. President, why don't we—we can go around the table, and I'm interested in hearing the different stories about the lives of some of your citizens.

Shall we start? How about you, doctor? Do you want to start?

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:28 p.m. at Casa de Narino. In his remarks, he referred to President Alvaro Uribe Velez of Colombia; and U.S. Ambassador to Colombia William B. Wood.

Remarks Following a Tour of Labradores Mayas in Iximche, Guatemala

March 12, 2007

[The President's remarks are joined in progress.]

—Mrs. Bush and I have been looking forward to meeting you, because you represent people who dream, people who work hard, and people who make wonderful products.

And there's two things I want to share. One, that USAID, which is funded through the generosity of the American people, is helping people like you all throughout the region to realize your dreams, because we believe in the dignity of every person. We want people to realize their God-given potential. You have proven that if given a

chance, you and hundreds of others can succeed, and that's what we want.

Secondly, free trade is important for a lot of people. It's important for our country, it's a gateway. It creates jobs in America just like it creates jobs here.

And so we thank you for your wonderful hospitality. We loved being with your families. *Gracias. Que Dios les bendiga.*

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:43 a.m. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks at a Welcoming Ceremony in Guatemala City, Guatemala

March 12, 2007

President Oscar Berger Perdomo of Guatemala. Dear friends, welcome all. On behalf of my Government and on behalf of the people of Guatemala, I am pleased to welcome President George W. Bush, his wife, and his distinguished delegation in our country.

We celebrate that President Bush decided to include Guatemala in his tour throughout Latin America. We welcome you with affection in this multiethnic and plural-lingual country, where many cultures live together, where the strong features of modernity, and where, after a lengthy and painful conflict that divided us during 14 years, we are, with determination, following the path of reconciliation, in search for building a plural, democratic, tolerant, and participatory society.

Our historic relationship with the United States of America, at times troubled, date far back. We are pleased to confirm that in recent decades this relationship matured and is today characterized by further interactions that are respectful and broad in scope.

We share values, including, of course, representative democracy and social justice. We also share interests that through last year with the entry into force of the free trade agreement between the Central American countries and the Dominican Republic on the one hand, and the United States of America on the other hand.